

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 10, 2011

Agenda Item: Bighorn Sheep Transplant Endorsement

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorse Course of Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 20 minutes

Background: Trap and transplant of bighorn sheep is an effective management tool. The removal of sheep assists population control. Transplanted animals can ultimately represent new populations or augment existing ones. Funds from auction licenses are available for transplants with all animals receiving a health assessment at capture. This item is an update to an April 2011 commission presentation.

Bighorn Sheep

- For the coming winter, bighorn sheep on Wild Horse Island in FWP Region 1 remain a source population for potential transplants.
- Bighorn sheep in the upper Madison (HD 302) also represent a source. Efforts to explore a bighorn sheep release in the Madison have not addressed all concerns relative to identifying a release site. As such, no release is proposed at this time.
- A new release site near Lewis and Clark Caverns is still proposed on public and private lands and is continuing through a public-review process, which may accommodate a release this winter pending Commission review of the public-review process results.
- The potential release to additional winter ranges near or adjacent to currently use winter ranges in the Bitterroot Valley (between HD 250 and HD 270 sheep populations) is proposed to be tabled due to concern for recent disease mortalities in the Skalkaho area.
- A newly proposed augmentation for the Tendoy Mountains south of Dillon has been nominated by Region 3 for possible release this winter. Due to previous disease in the past, regional and lab personnel are proposing to pre-capture some sheep to assess animal health before a release proceeds. Any release would be an augmentation of existing sheep (HD 315).

Public Involvement Process & Results: A formal public review process is ongoing for the one new release in the Lewis and Clark Caverns area. Any final commission endorsement would come after this formal public review process. Augmentations of existing populations may take place without further public review or process.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends endorsement of the winter 2012 augmentation in the Tendoy Mountains and proposes to defer the Bitterroot and Madison augmentations at this time. The single new release in the Lewis and Clark Caverns area will complete public process and additional commission review with potential for release later this winter. These efforts represent reasonable management tools in combination with hunter harvest.

Proposed Motion: I move the FWP Commission endorse the new augmentation proposal in the Tendoy Mountains and continued public process for the new release and to defer the Bitterroot and Madison augmentations at this time as presented by FWP.